

It is my long-held belief that we must work to ensure those who serve in the Armed Forces are provided with the care and support they deserve after honorably defending their country. To that end, I've worked closely with my colleagues on the Veterans Affairs committee to enact fiscally responsible legislation providing for the healthcare, educational, and housing needs of these returning heroes.

The **FY 2010 Veterans Administration Appropriations Bill** provided important investments in the VA system, benefiting veterans young and old. Of note is the \$4.6 billion for mental health care to meet the growing needs of troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Also, \$440 million in the bill has been specially allocated to improve access to services for those veterans living in rural areas such as the Central Valley. Moreover, the bill contained important investments in the VA claims system to reduce processing times of pending compensation claims, and funding for new programs to help keep our veterans and their families from becoming homeless. Last year, the Central California VA Healthcare Center in Fresno received \$7 million in funding to pay for construction of a mental health and rehabilitation building through the appropriations bill. This year's bill will also allow for the approval of more funding for Valley priorities.

Looking forward, there is much more we must do to safeguard these American heroes. This is why I have cosponsored two important bills that I hope will soon pass the House of Representatives. First, I support HR 147, which would allow taxpayers to donate \$3 from their income tax returns to a homeless veteran's assistance fund. Lastly, I've cosponsored HR 2474, the Veterans Educational Equity Act, which would clarify language in the Post 9/11 educational assistance program, ensuring that veterans have the ability to attend the college or technical school of their choice after separating from the military.

Sadly, many older veterans in our Valley face challenges in securing adequate housing and extended-care services. Opening a modern, efficient, and permanent veteran's home in Fresno I will continue to work with my colleagues and our local partners to see this project to completion. has long been one of my goals.

No matter how many pressing challenges we face, taking care of those who fight for our country must remain a top priority. These important measures are one step in the ongoing process.